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ABSTRACT

The labor market and marital status experiences of women in their forties were examined using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women, which tracked the experiences of women from ages 40 to 49 during the 1967-86 time period. Findings included the following: (1) over 85% worked at some time during their forties; (2) they averaged 289 weeks, although 1 in 4 worked 480 weeks or more; (3) high school dropouts worked substantially fewer weeks and were less likely to be in the labor force both at 40 and at 49; (4) high school dropouts were less likely to be married both at 40 and at 49 than other women; (5) nonwhite women were more likely to be in the labor force at both ages than white women were; (6) compared to white women, nonwhites were more likely to be single at both ages and to have changed marital status over the decade; and (7) 46% of college-educated women were in the labor force at both ages. (KC)

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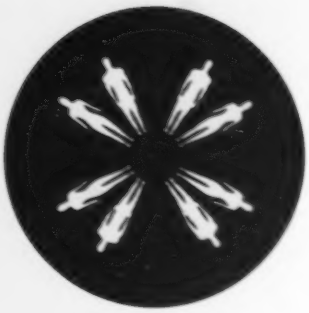

Work and Family: Women in Their Forties

Data from the National Longitudinal Surveys

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Report 843
April 1993

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This issue of *Work and Family* examines the labor market and marital status experiences of women in their forties using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women. These data track the experiences of women as they aged from 40 to 49 during the 1967-86 time period. Over 85 percent of these women worked at some time in their forties. On average, women worked 289 weeks, or about 58 percent of weeks worked by those who work a full-year each year during their forties over this time period. There are significant differences between women in labor force attachment and marital status transitions by race and education. In particular, among women in their forties, high school dropouts worked substantially fewer weeks, and were less likely to be in the labor force at both age 40 and age 49. They were also less likely to be married at both age 40 and age 49 than other women.

Overview

By age 40, most women have completed some important lifetime events such as schooling and childbearing. But many women in their forties are actively involved in the labor market and face a number of labor market and marital status decisions, which are often interrelated. In 1992, over 70 percent of women in their forties participated in the labor force.[1]

This report presents information on the labor market and marital status experiences of women in their forties. The data provide information on a sample of women who were between the ages of 30 and 45 in 1967 and who have been interviewed regularly since.

These data provide an opportunity to examine labor force behavior over extended periods of time. The sample used here is restricted to those women for whom there is complete information between the ages of 40 and 49. Consequently, the data in this analysis refer to the experiences of women who were born between 1927 and 1936 and who aged from 40 to 49 during the 1967-86 period.

[1] This figure is taken from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Labor force and employment status figures from the CPS are published monthly in *Employment and Earnings*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Weeks worked

How much did these women typically work during their forties? Table 1 displays the average number of weeks worked by women as well as a categorical distribution of weeks worked among women in the 40 to 49 age range. Whereas, women working a "full-year" each year over this period would work 480-520 weeks, these women worked, on average, about 289 weeks over these 10 years. Only about 1 of 7 women (14.3 percent) did not work at all between ages 40 and 49. In contrast, about 1 of 4 women (23.5 percent) worked 480 weeks or more in their forties.

Women other than white worked about 12 more weeks than white women, on average, and this difference appears to occur primarily because a higher percentage of white women did not work at all during these ages and because a greater percentage of other women worked full year over the period, 1967-86. College educated women worked more weeks than women without a college education, on average, whereas women without a high school diploma worked fewer weeks than all others.[2] College educated women worked about 88 weeks more than high school dropouts. Women with less than a high school education were less likely to work full year throughout their forties and more apt to not work at all than other women.

Due to the increasing labor force participation rate of women, it might be expected that women born in later years would work a greater number of weeks in their forties than women born in earlier years. In order to examine this issue for this cohort, women were grouped into 2-year categories by birth year. Table 1 shows that while there is no definitive trend in average weeks worked by birth-year categories, women born after 1930 averaged more weeks worked (about 300 weeks) than those born between 1927 and 1930 (about 270 weeks). This difference appears to have occurred because a higher percent of women born after 1930 worked 240 weeks or more than women born in or before 1930.

Labor force participation transitions

Another dimension of labor market experience which provides a measure of labor force attachment is labor

[2] Women are placed into an educational category based on their highest grade completed at age 40.

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force participation status. Table 2 displays information which compares labor force participation status at age 40 and age 49. About two-thirds of the women were in the same labor force status at age 49 as age 40, about 38 percent of these women were in the labor force both at ages 40 and 49, and about 29 percent were out of the labor force at both ages. Approximately a third of the women changed labor force participation status. About 13 percent of the women who were in the labor force at age 40 were not at age 49, and nearly 20 percent who were out of the labor force at age 40 were in the labor force at age 49. Overall, about 26 percent of those who were in the labor force at age 40 were out at age 49, and about 41 percent who were out of the labor force at age 40 were labor force participants at age 49.

There are significant differences in labor force participation transitions by race. Women other than white were more likely to be in the labor force both at age 40 and age 49 than white women. They were also more likely than white women to move from in the labor force at age 40 to out of the labor force at age 49. In addition, women other than white were less likely than white women to move from out of the labor force at age 40 to in the labor force at age 49.

About 46 percent of college educated women were in the labor force at age 40 and 49, which is more than any other educational group. In contrast, about a third of high school dropouts were in the labor force at both ages. Also, about a third of high school dropouts were out of the labor force at both ages, which is the highest proportion of the educational groups.

As in the data for weeks worked, there was not much of a pattern in labor force participation transition status by birth-year category. However, those born after 1930 were more likely to be in the labor force at age 40 and 49 and less likely to be out of the labor force at both ages than women born between 1927 and 1930.

Marital status transitions

Information on marital status transitions for women between age 40 and age 49 is shown in table 3. The majority of women (72.2 percent) were married at both ages 40 and 49.[3] Nearly 14 percent of the women were single at both ages, whereas 10 percent changed from being married to single. About 1 out of 25 women (3.9 percent) changed from being single at age 40 to being married at age 49.

There are considerable differences in marital status transitions by race. While over three-quarters of white women were married at age 40 and 49, less than half of other women were married at both ages. Compared to white women, other women were more likely to be single at both ages and to have changed marital status between age 40 and age 49.

Although there is not a definitive pattern in marital status transitions by educational category, women with less than a high school education were the least likely to be married both at age 40 and age 49. High school dropouts were the most likely to be single at both these ages.

Women who were born in later years were slightly less likely to be married at both ages 40 and 49 than those born in earlier years. In particular, while over 74 percent of women born in the years 1927 and 1928 were married at age 40 and 49, about 70 percent of women born in the years 1935 and 1936 were married at both these ages. There is no discernable pattern in other marital status transitions by birth-year category.

[3] Those who were married at age 40 and 49 were not necessarily married to the same husband at age 40 and age 49. All women represented in table 3 may have had an intervening marriage/divorce between age 40 and 49.

Table 1. Weeks worked by women age 40 to age 49, 1967-86 time period

Category	Mean	Weeks worked Distribution of weeks (in percent)			
		0	1-239	240-479	480 +
Total	288.5	14.3	24.5	37.7	23.5
Race					
White	287.2	14.5	24.4	38.0	23.2
Other	298.5	12.8	25.1	35.6	26.5
Education					
Less than high school	241.6	17.2	32.3	35.5	15.1
High school graduate	309.1	13.5	20.7	37.7	28.1
Some college	292.2	13.0	25.2	36.8	24.9
College graduate	329.9	10.8	18.0	44.9	26.3
Birth year					
1927-28	272.2	13.9	29.5	33.8	22.8
1929-30	273.5	17.5	24.7	37.3	20.5
1931-32	301.5	14.6	20.9	39.8	24.7
1933-34	300.1	12.2	24.0	39.2	24.6
1935-36	298.5	13.2	22.6	38.9	26.3

Table 2. Labor force participation status at age 40 and age 49 for women over the 1967-86 time period
(in percent)

Category	Labor force participation status transition			
	In at 40 In at 49	In at 40 Out at 49	Out at 40 In at 49	Out at 40 Out at 49
Total	38.3	13.4	19.8	28.5
Race				
White	37.3	12.7	21.1	28.9
Other	45.7	18.9	10.1	25.3
Education				
Less than high school	32.7	20.2	13.8	33.3
High school graduate	39.7	10.8	22.7	26.8
Some college	41.1	8.5	22.8	27.6
College graduate	45.8	10.0	21.5	22.7
Birth year				
1927-28	35.5	12.5	21.0	31.0
1929-30	34.2	12.3	22.2	31.3
1931-32	38.9	13.9	19.1	28.1
1933-34	43.4	13.5	18.0	25.1
1935-36	40.3	15.0	18.3	26.4

Table 3. Marital status at age 40 and age 49 for women over the 1967-86 time period
(in percent)

Category	Marital status transition			
	Married at 40 Married at 49	Married at 40 Single at 49	Single at 40 Married at 49	Single at 40 Single at 49
Total	72.2	10.2	3.9	13.9
Race				
White	75.7	9.7	3.5	11.1
Other	45.9	12.5	7.0	34.6
Education				
Less than high school	65.3	10.9	4.7	19.1
High school graduate	76.8	9.5	3.9	9.8
Some college	69.3	12.0	2.9	15.8
College graduate	74.4	7.9	2.5	15.2
Birth year				
1927-28	74.4	10.4	3.5	11.7
1929-30	73.4	8.9	3.4	14.3
1931-32	71.5	9.7	3.4	15.4
1933-34	71.4	11.4	5.5	11.7
1935-36	69.9	9.7	3.9	16.5

Technical Note

Data in this report are from the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS), which are sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The Bureau contracts with the Center For Human Resource Research of The Ohio State University to manage the surveys and provide user services. The NLS were begun in the mid-1960's with the drawing of four samples: Young Men who were 14-24 years old as of January 1, 1966, Young Women who were 14-24 years old as of January 1, 1968, Older Men who were 45-59 years old as of January 1, 1966, and Mature Women who were 30-44 years old as of January 1, 1967. Each sample originally had about 5,000 individuals with oversamples of blacks. In the early 1980's, the Young Men and Older Men surveys were discontinued. The two women's surveys continue and are currently collected every 2 years. The data collection is undertaken for BLS by the Bureau of the Census.

In 1979, a new cohort was begun with a sample of over 12,000 young men and women who were 14-21 years of age as of January 1, 1979. It includes oversamples of blacks, Hispanics, economically disadvantaged whites, and youth in the military. The military oversample was discontinued after the 1984 survey, and the economically disadvantaged white oversample was discontinued after the 1990 survey. This survey is called the Youth cohort, and the cohort members have been interviewed every year since it began. The data collection for the Youth cohort is undertaken by NORC (National Opinion Research Center), a social science research center affiliated with the University of Chicago.

The data in this report are weighted so that the sample is representative of the age group studied. The sample includes those individuals who were respondents at age 49. The Mature Women's survey was not interviewed in the years 1968, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1978, 1980, 1983, and 1985. Restrospective questions provide for data on weeks worked for all years except 1973 and 1975. For these years it was assumed that women worked the average of the number of weeks worked the year preceding and following the missing year. Information on labor force status and marital status is not available at age 40 and age 49 for some respondents. In these instances, data from age 39 was used in place of age 40, and data from age 50 was used in place of age 49.

All inferences that are discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level. Due to sampling variability, small differences between estimates that are not discussed in the text should be interpreted with caution. For a detailed explanation of the NLS, see *NLS Handbook 1993* (Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University). For information about the NLS, or to be placed on a mailing list for this publication, write to National Longitudinal Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Research and Evaluation, 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE., Room 4915, Washington, DC 20212-0001, or call (202) 606-7405.

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